

CHRISTIAN FENGER

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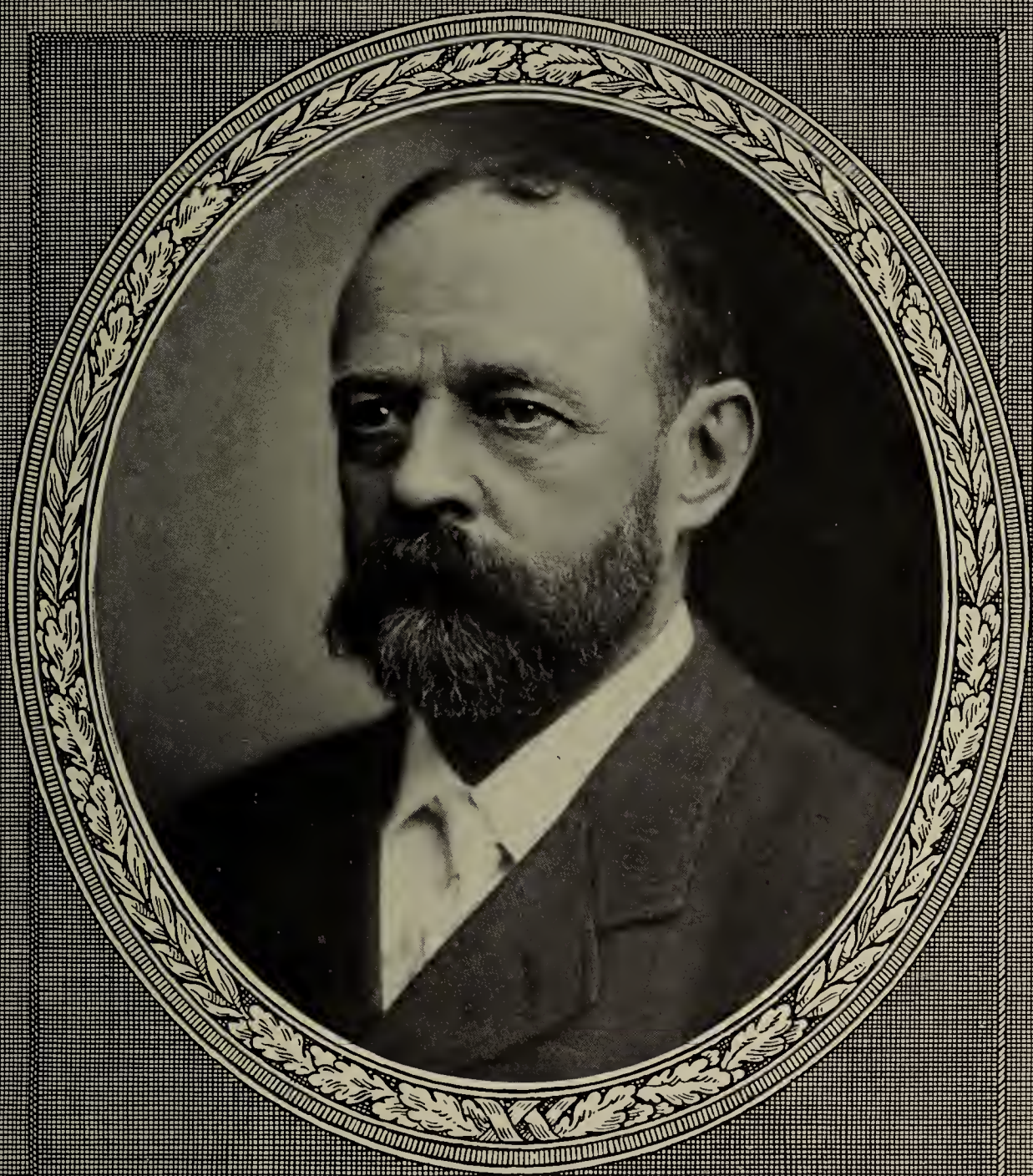
CHRISTIAN FENGER was born at Breininggaard Breinige Sogn, Denmark, November 3, 1840. He was one of twelve children born to Kammerand Hans Fritz Fenger and Frederrike Mathilde Fjelstrup, both representatives of excellent families and well-to-do farmers. All of the sons secured excellent educational advantages, but with self-help. In 1851 the boy Christian Fenger entered the Herlufsholm school and graduated therefrom in 1859. He had a great love for the natural sciences and entered the Polyteknisk Lærestalt, beginning the course in civil engineering. After one year his father induced him to take up the study of medicine. In 1860 he passed his first examination in anatomy, zoology, chemistry, and botany and soon thereafter passed an examination in philosophy, *cum laude*. He partly earned his way by teaching in the Melchior high school and by tutoring dental and medical students. During the war between Denmark and Prussia, he became an assistant surgeon at the Augustenborg Lazareth. In 1865 he again took up the study of medicine and in this year passed an examination to practice medicine. During the next 3 years he acted as an assistant to Dr. Villem Meyer in clinical otology and collaborated in the investigation of adenoid vegetations in the nasopharynx. In 1869 he was appointed interne in the Royal Frederik's Hospital for a two-year period. During this period he wrote a prize essay entitled "Concerning Subperiosteal Operations and Evidence," and also made fundamental experiments concerning gunshot wounds of horses at the Royal Veterinary College, and invented instruments for locating and extracting bullets from tissues. This experimental work was rewarded by a grant from the Royal Danish Ministry of War which enabled Fenger to take part in the Franco-German War. In January, 1871, he was appointed by Professor Socin, of Basel, to serve in the Red Cross International Ambulance and assigned to duty on the battlefield of Bourtaki-Werden (Haute-Saône). His experience in the war enabled him to write a report on the endoscopy of gunshot wounds. Immediately after the war he studied pathological anatomy and attended the surgical clinics at Vienna, and on his return to Denmark was appointed prosector to the Kommunehospital. In this position he continued until the end of 1874 during which time he took advantage of the splendid opportunities for investigation in pathology and morbid anatomy which was evidenced by the

important papers he completed on "Cancer of the Stomach," "Acute Hydronephrosis," "Gonorrhœal Rheumatism," "Endoscopy of Urethra," "Stenosis of Ostium Pulmonale," and others. The article on cancer of the stomach was written after painstaking investigation which included the explanation of the pain in cancer of the stomach as due to the involvement of the end-filaments of the pneumogastric nerve in the cancer mass. This was his thesis for the degree of Doctor of Medicine which was granted in 1874, approximately 13 years after beginning the study of medicine.

In the winter of 1874-5, he was appointed docent in pathological anatomy and became a candidate for the professorship of pathology upon the death of Professor Rasmussen. He was prepared to take part in the competition for this position, but the place was finally given to Professor Carl Lange by appointment. Fenger looked forward to an academic career in pathology and was disappointed that he was not permitted to compete for the place. However he accepted the situation philosophically and finally determined to make surgery his life's work, for which his long and extensive experience and investigation of morbid anatomy and pathology especially prepared him. He therefore decided to seek outside of Denmark the opportunities which would enable him to dedicate himself to surgery. In 1875 he went to Alexandria, Egypt, to assume the practice of his brother, Dr. Sophus Fenger, while the latter visited Denmark. On the return of his brother he located in Cairo where he resided with a friend, Dr. Bull. Here he secured a salaried position as *Médecin du Quartier de Kalifa*, under the chief of medical affairs in Cairo, Dr. Ahata Bey. In this position he investigated trachoma in the children of the public schools, and an epidemic disease of horses and mules which prevailed in Egypt following the war with Abyssinia in 1875. In 1876 he suffered from dysentery including an infection of the liver which interrupted the investigations he was making upon hæmatobium bilharzii. The winter of 1876-7 he spent in Mentone, France, and recovered his health. After his return to Cairo in the spring of 1877, the infection of the liver reappeared and he determined to seek a temperate climate. He had become acquainted with some American Army officers, among them Major Irgens, who persuaded Fenger to accompany him to Bloomington, Illinois. In June, 1877, he resigned his position with the Egyptian government and arrived in the United States in the fall of that year.

CAREER IN THE UNITED STATES

On a visit to Chicago soon after his arrival in the country, he was persuaded by his countryman and friend, Dr. S. J. Jacobson, to locate in Chicago. Dr. Jacobson introduced Fenger to the members of the staff of the Cook County Hospital and he was invited to conduct a few autopsies at that institution. His scientific demonstration of pathological anatomy created such an impression that Dr. Isaac N. Danforth, who held the appointment of pathologist to Cook County



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Hospital, immediately tendered his resignation for the purpose of making the position available to Fenger. From the spring of 1878 until 1893, Fenger was the chief pathologist at the County Hospital; for 14 or 15 years the autopsy room at the County Hospital was the Mecca of medical students, internes and members of the medical profession of Chicago who for the first time in the medical history of the Middle West had an opportunity to witness scientifically conducted autopsies and to learn the fundamentals of morbid anatomy and pathology.

In 1879, Fenger served in the surgical wards for the various members of the surgical staff of the hospital when they were absent from the city on vacations. This surgical service gave him the opportunity to introduce Listerism—anti-septic surgery—in the Middle West. In 1880 Fenger secured appointment with a regular surgical service in the County Hospital in which he continued for the next 12 years.

From 1880 to 1884 he was curator of Rush Medical College Museum; in 1884 he was appointed professor of surgery in the College of Physicians and Surgeons; in 1893 he became professor of surgery in the Northwestern University Medical School, and in 1899 he became professor of surgery in Rush Medical College affiliated with the University of Chicago. He was surgeon in chief of the Passavant Memorial Hospital, the German Hospital of Chicago, and the Lutheran Tabitha Hospital from the time they were organized until his death. From 1893 to 1899 he was attending surgeon at the Mercy Hospital, Chicago, and from 1899 until his death, he was attending surgeon at the Presbyterian Hospital.

He was a member of the Chicago Medical Society, its president in 1901; the Chicago Surgical Society; the Illinois State Medical Association; the American Medical Association; and the American Surgical Association, its vice-president in 1895.

He was a prolific writer upon subjects relating to surgery, special pathology, and diagnosis. These papers were published under the joint editorship of Drs. L. Hektoen and C. G. Buford.¹

Soon after he located in Chicago, Fenger married Caroline Sophie Abilgaard, who was born in Denmark and came to the United States with her parents when 5 years of age. This happy union was characterized by mutual, sympathetic understanding. Two children were born to them, a son, Frederick A., who graduated at Cornell University and qualified as a marine architect, and a daughter, Augusta Maria.

FENGER THE SCIENTIST AND MAN

In the foregoing the writer has given bare statements of the struggles for education, the professional positions held and other data of historical interest. The outstanding features presented are the evidences of the purposeful industry of the man. Undismayed by difficulties and obstructions to the attainment of

¹The Collected Works of Christian Fenger. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders & Co.

objectives, he won success in practically every project undertaken. His knowledge of morbid anatomy and of pathology was phenomenal for that day and was attained by unremitting energy during his life in Denmark and Egypt and his earlier experience in the United States. This knowledge of pathology and of morbid anatomy made him one of the great surgeons of his time. He never became a brilliant operator, but what he lacked in operating skill was more than compensated for by thoroughness and knowledge of pathology. In diagnosis he was unsurpassed by any of his living contemporaries. He spoke five or more modern languages, but did not possess a ready command of any language. Nevertheless, he was a great teacher and though his speech was usually marked by halting words, he was able to impart knowledge to others with greater clearness than most teachers with fluent speech. He was especially fond of young men who showed by their every day lives that they had a thirst for knowledge and expressed this by purposeful, enduring work. He spent hours of his valuable time, both of the day and night, in the instruction of young medical men; in these interesting conferences he frequently forgot the passage of time in the apparent joy of teaching. It was through his influence that many of the young medical men of the period from 1880 to 1900 visited the clinics of Germany, Austria, France, and England, and later became leaders in their chosen fields of work in the United States. While Fenger loved above every other thing in his professional life to help young men who were not afraid to work, he expressed an impatience with the frivolous and indolent men with whom he came in contact. Always he had the courage of his convictions and expressed them with blunt words which sometimes gave those unacquainted with him the idea of unfriendliness. But no man the writer has ever known was freer of envy or jealousy of others. Always he availed himself of every opportunity to express appreciation of the work of other men, provided it was characterized by honesty and efficiency. He was honest, intellectually and professionally. He was sincere and by nature simple in his deportment and daily life. He was free from cupidity and sympathetic with the poor; to each patient he applied all of the knowledge he possessed and all of the time necessary disregardful of financial reward.

Fenger lived in Chicago 24 years. During that period of time he exerted an influence in scientific medicine unequalled by any other individual. It was due to his influence and particularly as a pathologist that there developed such men as Nicholas Senn, John B. Murphy, William J. Mayo, Lewis L. McArthur, and many others celebrated as great surgeons, and Ludvig Hektoen, E. R. LeCount, H. G. Wells, and others recognized as great pathologists, and many practitioners of internal medicine throughout the Middle West and in Chicago. This splendid influence of Fenger was generally recognized as evidenced by the testimonial banquet tendered him by several hundred members of the profession, many of them from distant states on the sixtieth anniversary of his birth. The Fenger

Memorial Association, organized soon after his death, perpetuates his memory through scientific research carried on through the income of an endowment fund.

His home life was ideal and happy. Both he and Mrs. Fenger loved art, music and literature, and the society of cultured friends. Christian Fenger passed from this life on March 7, 1902, but though 20 years have passed, he lives today in the hearts and minds of hundreds of physicians and surgeons who were proud to call him master; and he will continue to live through other generations by the work of his students and his pupils' students.

